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June 4, 1983

To: OVP - Mr. Donald P. Gregg  
NSC - Mr. Robert Kimmitt  
CIA -   
DOD - Col. John Stanford  
JCS - Ltc. Dennis Stanley

25X1

Subject: CPPG Analysis of Potential for Syrian-Israeli  
Conflict and U.S. Options

The attached draft has been revised to take into account views expressed at the CPPG meeting on June 3 and to reflect revisions suggested by DOD, JCS, NSC, and CIA on June 4. It has now been cleared for consideration at the CPPG meeting on Monday, June 6.

Charles Hill  
Executive Secretary

Attachment:

As stated.

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CPPG ANALYSIS OF POTENTIAL FOR  
SYRIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT AND U.S. OPTIONS

Introduction

Recent Syrian military activity and Israeli responses have heightened the potential for conflict between Israel and Syria. This analysis examines several possible scenarios of Syrian-Israeli hostility and suggests U.S. responses, particularly vis-a-vis the Soviet Union, Syria and Israel.

Since early May, Syria has undertaken a series of activities which have heightened Israeli anxieties, causing many in the Israeli military to draw parallels between these recent Syrian activities and Syrian actions immediately prior to the outbreak of hostilities in 1973 with the implication that Israel must not be caught unprepared as it was a decade ago.

-- During the Secretary's shuttle in early May, Syrian forces fired on Israeli forces in the Bekaa for the first time in many months.

-- The Israelis claimed that SA-7 missiles were fired at an Israeli helicopter on May 23. This incident could have been undertaken by either Syrian or PLO forces since both are equipped with this shoulder-fired missile.

-- Between May 24-28 the Syrians conducted a large-scale command and control training exercise which encompassed all elements of their armed forces, including air defense units and some of their units in Lebanon. It appears that this exercise was under the overall supervision of the Soviets. One reliable source indicates the scenario of this exercise was a simulated attack by Israeli forces on Syrian units in the Bekaa during which the Syrian units were to move from a defensive posture to an offensive one. While exercises of this type are not uncommon (they occurred annually in the 1979-1981 period), the timing of this particular exercise -- when combined with recent incidents and the Israeli fear of being caught by surprise -- greatly heightened tensions between the two sides.

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-- On May 25 Syrian MIG 23 aircraft probably fired two missiles at Israeli reconnaissance/patrol aircraft over the Bekaa. While the Israeli aircraft were not hit, this encounter -- the first between Israel and Syria since last August -- also greatly heightened tension between the two sides.

-- In addition, there is a possibility (although yet unconfirmed) that Syria may have introduced elements of one SA-6 unit into Lebanon. The Israeli military does not yet have any evidence of Syrian reintroduction of SA-6's into Lebanon. We do, however, have intelligence that Syria recently placed jamming radar into Lebanon.

These most recent actions were preceded by Syrian military steps which added to Israeli concern:

--- The movement in early May of one and possibly two brigades into Lebanon, raising total Syrian troop strength there from about 45,000 to over 50,000 men.

-- The admission of 2,000 - 3,000 Palestinian fighters largely from the Syrian-backed Palestine Liberation Army to areas in Lebanon controlled by Syria, raising the Palestinian total to well over 10,000.

-- The repositioning of armor and artillery units on the Golan Heights.

-- The preparation of hospitals, command facilities, emergency food stocks, civil defense measures, and the call-up of reservists with technical specialities.

Until recently, the Israeli response had been remarkably restrained. The IDF concentrated on strengthening its defensive positions in the Bekaa and until recent days has taken a non-alarmist attitude toward what is perceived in Israel as Syrian attempts to disrupt the Israel-Lebanon agreement. However, on May 26 the Israeli level of anxiety increased markedly when Israel told us that, in reaction to the Syrian "ambush" of Israeli aircraft on May 25, the IDF had taken "limited reinforcement measures." These "limited measures" have resulted in the addition of an armored brigade to Israeli forces in Lebanon, bringing total strength there to about 18,000. The Israelis also asked for our assessment of Soviet intentions and requested that we consider more active measures with regard to both the Soviets and the Syrians -- both public and private -- which would disabuse both parties of any idea that if hostilities broke out and the Soviets

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intervened on behalf of Syria, the U.S. would remain passive. The Israeli position is that this would be an important form of deterrence and, in its absence the Syrians could well miscalculate. Israel specifically pressed us to raise our concerns directly with the Soviets and take some action concerning the movement of our fleet in the Mediterranean. As will be detailed in the following pages, we have already acted in response to these specific Israeli requests.

#### Possible Scenarios of Hostility Between Israel and Syria

The following represent the range of possible scenarios of hostility between Israel and Syria. These scenarios range from the lowest level of hostility to all-out war. They are not mutually exclusive; in fact, there is a real danger that relatively low-level fighting could rapidly escalate into much wider conflict before the U.S. has any opportunity to influence events. At the same time we must recognize that our response to any of these scenarios may conflict with other basic U.S. goals in the region. For instance, our desire to limit Soviet gains may lead to a situation which ensures Lebanon remains a base of instability in the region:

A. Attack on Israeli personnel/installations outside the region which acts as catalyst for Israeli retaliation against PLO positions in Lebanon (e.g., similar to attempted assassination of Israeli Ambassador Argov in London on June 2, 1982).

B. PLO infiltration and/or terrorist attacks on IDF forces in Lebanon suggesting a war of attrition, prompting Israeli response ranging from limited attacks on specific PLO installations to a full-scale strike on Syrian forces in Lebanon. (A variant of this scenario is that Israeli forces in the Chuf mountains begin to take casualties as a byproduct of the Christian-Druze fighting and take action to neutralize the Druze. Syria then enters the fighting to help the Druze.).

C. Syrian reintroduction of SAM units in Lebanon and Israeli detection and elimination of these sites, prompting a Syrian response.

D. Israeli/Syrian air clashes over Lebanon or Syrian firing of surface to air missiles at Israeli aircraft from Lebanon.

E. Syria fires SA-5 or other SAMs from sites in Syria at Israeli reconnaissance/patrol aircraft and Israel responds by attacking the SAM sites in Syria.

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F. Israeli preemptive strike on SA-5 or other SAM sites in Syria.

G. Syrian-initiated artillery clashes in Lebanon, prompting a retaliatory Israeli response.

H. Ground hostilities between Israel and Syria/PLO in Lebanon.

I. Israeli preemptive air/ground attack on Syrian/PLO forces in Lebanon following intelligence suggesting a Syrian intention to attack.

J. Israeli-Syrian hostilities between ground forces spread beyond Lebanon's borders into Syria and include Israeli strikes on SAM sites within Syria and/or Soviet/Syrian SA-5 strikes against Israeli aircraft over Israeli territory.

While the above scenarios represent a relatively all-inclusive list of possible initial military activities between Israel and Syria, we are far less certain about the range of likely calculated actions which might be carried out and the responses to such actions. We cannot discount the possibility -- with both sides mobilizing and in a highly tense reactive posture -- that there could be a miscalculation or misperception which would lead to hostilities neither side wants but which neither side is able to stop.

#### Dealing with the Soviets

The Soviets' intentions vis-a-vis Lebanon clearly are to block conclusion of a US-brokered, Lebanese-Israeli accord. The thrust of current Soviet policy is to encourage Syrian and other Arab opposition to the agreement in order to guard against a further erosion of Soviet influence in Syria and a revival of the Reagan Initiative. The Soviet influence in Damascus, although impossible to quantify, is considerable. We believe that Moscow's actions will be determined primarily by the dynamics of its relations with Syria, events on the ground in Lebanon, and, most importantly, its calculations of how the current situation can best be exploited to reestablish a Soviet role in Middle East diplomacy. We believe the Soviets have an accurate appreciation of the dangers of a new outbreak of hostilities, and we have clearly conveyed our own concerns on this score to Moscow in a number of recent, high-level diplomatic exchanges. On one hand, Andropov may want to avoid a clash which would result in another humiliation for Soviet arms and Soviet friends as well as ultimately raise the

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possibility of an unwanted U.S.-Soviet confrontation. His caution may be underscored by his desire not to risk having a major foreign policy crisis at the time of a CPSU Central Committee Plenum which will reportedly take place in mid-June. On the other hand, Andropov may calculate that he can limit the hostilities to ensure Soviet gains and therefore, he may be prepared to take substantial risks to deny a major U.S. foreign policy victory and gain Soviet access. In proceeding, he will have the CPSU Plenum very much in mind, hoping to show his mettle in his first major foreign policy crisis.

At present, the Soviets, who appear to be shoring up Syrian resolve not to accept the Lebanese-Israeli Agreement, may well be giving Damascus the green light to take steps designed to keep the kettle boiling in Lebanon. In recent weeks the Soviets have made efforts -- including making provocative public statements, encouraging Lebanese leftists to resist the Israeli-Lebanese Agreement, and stepping up arms deliveries to the PLO -- to ensure a level of tension remains. But they are probably also urging Damascus to be "careful" not to push things too far. In this connection, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko told Ambassador Hartman May 31 that Syria had "no intention" of initiating hostilities. The Soviets have refused to be pinned down on the extent of their defense commitment to Syria or the "rules of engagement" for Soviet forces in that country.

At the same time, we must realize that the Soviets are running some high risks in Lebanon, perhaps too high when weighed against the potential for miscalculation. For instance, they probably are hoping Assad's appreciation of Syria's relative military weakness vis-a-vis Israel will act as a restraint on Syrian actions. They also may be hoping that the SA-5s in Syria, combined with U.S. pressure, will act as a restraint on Israel. A miscalculation of either of these considerations is a distinct possibility and could result in unintentional hostilities between Israel and Syria.

Whatever the outcome of the current tense situation in Lebanon, the Soviets show every intention of progressively increasing the size and sophistication of their military presence in Syria. At some point, the Israelis may conclude that this process is beginning to erode their military superiority vis-a-vis Syria. In such circumstances, the barriers against Israeli preemptive action could be lowered dangerously. Nevertheless, it is impossible to predict with certainty Soviet responses to various contingencies which might develop. Indeed, the Soviets themselves may not agree among themselves on how to deal with the full implications of their

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increased military deployments in Syria, particularly the SA-5 missile complexes. Soviets will probably remain uninvolved as long as Syrian-Israeli hostilities are confined to Lebanon and do not escalate into major clashes. (The Soviets historically have drawn a distinction between what happens in Syria and to Syrian troops in Lebanon. Indeed, the Soviets may hope their presence constitutes a deterrent to any Israeli military action against Syria).

In the event of major clashes in the air or on the ground in Lebanon, the Soviets would be under extreme pressure from Syria to permit use of the SA-5s against Israeli C<sup>2</sup> aircraft or other targets and might well have to yield to such pressures. Should fighting threaten to spread to Syria, this pressure would increase. Use of the SA-5s would prompt Israeli attacks on them. Previous CPPG exercises have noted that if the SA-5s are attacked or if large-scale fighting spills over into Syria, the Soviets would at a minimum feel compelled rapidly to reinforce and resupply Syria. They could raise their alert status and threaten or possibly introduce into the region new offensive weapons (e.g., surface-to-surface missiles, F-111-type aircraft, etc.,) which if used could inflict serious damage on Israel. Further possibilities include the introduction of Soviet pilots, limited ground force units, and an enlarged Soviet advisory role in Syria. Looking at Soviet military options to assist Syria, the Soviets are well aware that one Soviet airborne division is no match for 11 Israeli armored divisions, and Israeli air power would greatly complicate any Soviet options in the Eastern Mediterranean. The only effective option would be a major Soviet expeditionary force -- which would surely provoke a U.S.-Soviet crisis. In any case, if Israeli forces moved rapidly to achieve their objectives in Syria, it is unlikely that the Soviets could move enough of their assets rapidly enough to affect the outcome. In fact, the possibility of any option involving the intervention of Soviet forces into an Israeli-Syrian conflict is quite limited -- due (if for no other reason) to a Soviet appreciation of the limited military resources it could bring to bear quickly in such a conflict.

Israeli retaliation may very well result in extensive casualties among the Soviets manning the SA-5 installations. In addition to the above-mentioned reinforcement and resupply effort, Moscow would probably respond with high-level diplomacy with the U.S. -- probably via the "hotline" -- and might well send some additional political-military signals to encourage the U.S. to restrain the Israelis. This might involve additional Soviet naval deployments in the Eastern Mediterranean and possibly increased readiness status of some

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selected units in the USSR. Once hostilities were over, the Soviets would almost certainly move again to bolster their military presence in Syria by replacing SA-5s and associated personnel, introducing even more advanced or capable military equipment into the area, and possibly by deploying limited ground force units to that country.

We also must anticipate the possibility that the Syrians will resort to a sudden attack which inflicts substantial damage on Israeli forces in Lebanon. Before Israel is able to retaliate -- perhaps where Syria is most vulnerable in the Golan Heights -- the Soviets would warn us that there will be serious repercussions going well beyond the Middle East to both Israeli and U.S. interests unless we restrain Israel. Under this scenario, in considering our response, we would want to consider carefully the Soviet ability to carry out its threats (e.g., What further damage can be done to an already moribund U.S.-Soviet relationship? What military pressure could the Soviets bring to bear against Israel over the short term?)

While there is little we can add to the strong messages we have given the Soviets over the past several months, we should continue to urge the need for restraint and point out the risks of escalation to the Soviets lest they are left with the impression the U.S. concern has diminished. Ambassador Hartman's May 31 meeting with Gromkyo provided a good opportunity to express our concern at a high level. Should hostilities break out, it will be essential to establish effective crisis communication with the Soviets from the outset. We will want to consider carefully the impact on the Soviets of any U.S. military moves we may contemplate both before and after hostilities begin, bearing in mind that our military moves would have a greater psychological than physical impact as Israel has sufficient military resources to defend itself over any short-term conflict. We also will want to bear in mind that we must take actions which make it very clear to the Soviets that we are not trying to restrain Israel because of fear of a Soviet response. To fail to convey this message would send a clear signal to the Soviets that their mere threat to take action would ensure Israeli restraint.

Before hostilities, any U.S. military moves (e.g. reinforcing the Sixth Fleet, upgrading the Defense Condition (DEFCON) in the region, etc.) may convince the Soviets of our seriousness. At the same time, we will need to bear in mind that a visible movement of U.S. military force could be viewed by the Soviets as a destabilizing factor in the region, resulting in a Soviet perception of a U.S. move to bolster an Israeli military initiative rather than of a U.S. response to

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Soviet/Syrian hostile actions. In any event, the high risk of misperception or miscalculation by either side emphasizes the need for caution and fine-tuning the timing of any military moves we may be contemplating.

One military move we could consider if tension rises but before an actual outbreak of hostilities would be for DOD to announce publicly that, given the current increase in tensions, we have decided to reinforce the Eisenhower carrier task force from assets drawn from the U.S. Atlantic Fleet. (A JCS analysis of the current U.S. and Soviet force dispositions in the Middle East is being submitted separately.) We have already also issued a public statement expressing our concern about heightened tensions in the region. This statement identified the Syrians, and by implication the Soviets, as responsible for the escalation in tension. The statement stopped short, however, of making public threats of any kind. In this regard, we must bear in mind that Soviet calculations of its own military posture in the region are conditioned by its perception of the U.S. as trying to introduce its forces throughout the region (e.g., in the Sinai (MFO), Beirut (MNF), and potentially a CENTCOM presence) to expand U.S. military capability and influence.

Although results by no means would be guaranteed, one additional step we should consider now would be to task the intelligence community -- through whatever means possible -- to try to obtain a better understanding of Soviet rules of engagement in the Lebanon-Syria context. This assessment would include an estimate not only of what the rules are but under what conditions they are subject to change.

If the conflict escalates into any of the more serious war scenarios posited earlier, we will have to look at possible U.S. military options to reinforce our crisis diplomacy. These include resupply of Israel and preparation of evacuation plans for U.S. Embassy personnel, American citizens in Lebanon, and U.S. MNF forces in Lebanon (and possibly the other MNF contingents and UNIFIL). Depending on the scenario, we will want to consider utilizing and reinforcing the Sixth Fleet, upgrading of DEFCON worldwide, a partial mobilization of U.S. forces (in response to a Soviet mobilization), U.S. air cover of resupply flights, and other military and diplomatic measures as appropriate. When considering possible U.S. military responses to Syria, we should quite frankly realize our military options are limited. In a war with Syria or even a limited one with the Soviets, there is little militarily Israel would need from us, although any U.S. gestures of military support would be psychologically reassuring.

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Dealing with the Syrians

Assad:

-- wants to destroy or significantly modify) the Israel-Lebanon agreement;

-- hopes to redeem Syria's pride from the humiliating defeat it suffered at the hands of Israel last summer;

-- wants to be taken as a serious player in regional diplomacy;

-- believes that Syria can play a "spoiler role" in U.S. peace initiatives throughout the region, resulting in the U.S. paying greater attention to Syrian interests (e.g., the Golan Heights) and more generally, to Syria as a "key actor" in the region;

-- is probably willing to accept high casualties and the loss of significant amounts of equipment if substantial damage can be inflicted on Israeli forces. This would argue for Syria pursuing a war of attrition against Israel in the Bekaa. Assad also probably believes Israel is weary and will accept a higher level of tension than it normally would tolerate.

At the same time, it is definitely in Syria's interest to keep any conflict with Israel localized within Lebanon.

In analyzing possible U.S. actions towards Syria, we must ask several basic questions:

-- In calculating its military moves, how independent of the Soviet Union is Syria? In the past Syria has demonstrated that it is fully capable of taking actions independent of the Soviets -- particularly on the ground in Lebanon -- as evidenced by Syria's deployment of two and a half divisions to the Jordan border without the Soviet's knowledge in 1980. We continue to believe that Assad retains this independence, notwithstanding the increased Soviet role in Syria. However, Assad would seek further assurances of Soviet support should Syrian-instigated activities in Lebanon escalate to threaten Syrian security.

-- By extension, should the U.S. treat Syria as a Soviet surrogate or as a more independent actor? Our approach thus far has been to try to draw some distance between the Soviets and Syrians, treating the latter as an independent entity. We

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should continue that approach, while making direct warnings to the Soviets to heighten Moscow's sense of the risks involved if events get out of hand.

-- How far will Syria go in escalating any confrontation with Israel? Syria will seek to avoid any fighting that spreads beyond Lebanon's borders into Syria.

-- In the event of an Israeli-Syrian conflict, what effect will our posture towards Syria have on Syria's willingness to withdraw from Lebanon? Obviously, while the two issues are not mutually exclusive, we would have to focus our attention on bringing hostilities to an end as quickly and as favorably as possible -- even if these actions had a temporarily counterproductive effect on Syria's willingness to withdraw from Lebanon.

Before the outbreak of hostilities, we already will have taken certain steps to convey to Syria the seriousness with which we regard their recent military actions:

-- Ambassador Paganelli, who was in the U.S. for the past two weeks, returned to Damascus May 30, several days ahead of schedule. We have let the word out to the press that his early return is directly linked to our concerns about increased tensions.

-- Paganelli held a meeting with the Foreign Minister upon his arrival to register our concern and counsel Syrian restraint. Before taking any further diplomatic steps, we should allow time for Paganelli's blunt message to sink in. We also will want to know what, if any, results the French were able to get from their approach to Syria. (We understand Secretary Shultz will discuss this matter with Cheysson at the upcoming NATO Ministerial.)

-- Should the U.S. and French messages have little effect, we could consider, in consultation with Ambassador Paganelli, the desirability of thinning out or even removing our dependents in Syria. If we decided to go this, Paganelli would inform Rifat Al-Assad (who has told us he has personal responsibility for the safety of our people) that we are taking such action because of the current tensions.

-- Later on, but before hostilities actually broke out, we may want to consider broadening our circle of high-level interlocutors in Damascus beyond President Assad to include his brother and others to warn of the risks of any Syrian plans to underwrite a campaign of attrition versus Israeli forces.

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-- At this stage, we also may want to consider a blunt message to the Saudis asking them to do more than they have done in the past intervening with Syria.

After hostilities erupt, we should continue to hold the Syrians responsible for PLO and Iranian activities in those areas of Lebanon under Syrian control. Our posture toward a Syrian initiated attack on Israel -- whether it stems from Syrian aircraft or Syrian artillery in the Bekaa -- should lead us to consider a strong U.S. diplomatic response combined with appropriate high visibility U.S. military reinforcement moves in the Eastern Mediterranean. As a result of our new approach in dealing with Syria over Lebanon, we would suggest altering a previous CPPG recommendation which called for treating Syria as a Soviet surrogate and instead deal with the Syrians as somewhat more independent an actor, particularly if we are confronted with Israeli-Syrian ground action in Lebanon.

#### Dealing with the Israelis

We currently are making a concerted effort to stay in close touch with Israel and share with them our perceptions and intelligence concerning the potential for hostilities between the Israelis and Syrians. While the recommendations from previous CPPG exercises regarding how the U.S. should deal with Israel -- both publicly and privately -- largely pertain, we believe the current tension dictates that we should bear in mind a number of important considerations.

-- It is useful to have a certain degree of ambiguity regarding our response to Israeli requests concerning how we would act under specific scenarios. While we want to convey a general message of strong U.S. support for Israel's legitimate defense needs, we do not want to give Israel assurances of specific U.S. actions lest the Israelis be stimulated into taking preemptive action knowing that they can count on these U.S. assurances.

-- Our experience in Lebanon has made it clear that Israel considers U.S. silence as synonymous with acquiescence or a "green light" for its actions. We should not repeat the past mistake of remaining silent if we feel there is a danger Israel will go too far by taking the battle into Syria or launching a preemptive strike against the SA-5s.

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-- On the other hand, if escalation develops into full-scale ground combat, we will not wish to impede Israel from achieving a rapid favorable result within Lebanon before the Soviets act in ways designed to bring the fight to a close.

-- We must continue to stay in constant communication with the Israelis during this crisis -- both on a diplomatic and intelligence level. In this regard, we must continue our willingness to exchange views and information as frequently as the Israelis request. On the intelligence level, we must continually compare our order-of-battle information and analytic assessments to insure that the Israelis do not get into their "worst case scenario" framework which has so often been the catalyst for Israeli military action.

-- While we know Israel has strong domestic pressures to bring the IDF home from Lebanon and put an end to the mounting casualties, we must not underestimate Israeli resolve to take decisive military action when it feels confronted. The Israelis will most likely continue to exercise as much restraint as practical but once Syria crosses that "red line" which Israel considers a threat to its security, Israel will not hesitate to respond with bold action in order to end the fighting before significant Israeli casualties are taken.

If hostilities result from Syrian/Soviet provocation, our diplomatic and military actions vis-a-vis Israel should deviate somewhat from the guidelines of previous CPPG exercises by focusing less on our efforts to restrain Israel and more on our support to Israel. Obviously, we will continue to stress the need for Israeli restraint if the Israelis feel compelled to respond disproportionately to lower level PLO terrorist attacks or infiltration as was the case last June. Similarly, we should take those same actions recommended in previous CPPG exercises to discourage Israel preemptive strikes against SA-5 sites in Syria. In the event of a successful Syrian ambush of Israeli aircraft over Lebanon, in all likelihood the Israelis will respond before we have had the opportunity to intervene.

Perhaps the most difficult scenario to address would be Syrian/PLO-initiated ground and artillery attacks against Israeli forces in Lebanon. While Assad may be willing to take casualties if he can inflict serious damage on Israeli forces, the Israelis will be under strong pressure to strike decisively to bring the hostilities to a rapid conclusion before casualties mount. In this regard, any efforts to urge Israeli restraint would likely fall on deaf ears. In any event, we may want to consider essentially accepting "proportionate" Israeli

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retaliation, instead concentrating our efforts on limiting geographically the scope of hostilities to the Bekaa Valley. We may wish to accept a "proportionate" Israeli response to a Syrian attack in order to limit and bring a quick end to the hostilities before they escalate out of control. At the same time we would want to lay down a clear marker to both Syria and the Soviet Union that they will have to be responsible for their provocative actions.

In addition to diplomatic support, in a more general conflict we would want to consider a highly visible military resupply effort as well as other appropriate manifestations of close military cooperation. In this regard, at some point we must be prepared to address Israel's inevitable request for a series of measures to demonstrate close U.S.-Israeli strategic cooperation (e.g., joint exercises, prepositioning of military supplies, etc.). Finally, in an all-out Israeli-Syrian conflict -- in which the fighting spills over into Syria or possibly Israel -- the U.S. will have two concerns: to end the fighting short of a major U.S.-Soviet confrontation and to ensure an outcome favorable to our interests. To accomplish the first objective, we will have little choice but to consult closely with the Soviets to bring a rapid end to such fighting. Our efforts should be directed at permitting the minimum Soviet role necessary to stop the hostilities while limiting opportunities for an additional Soviet role in the future and reinforcing our support of Israel's security both diplomatically and militarily.

At the same time, in a Syrian-Israeli war in present circumstances, the U.S. cannot be neutral. If the Syrians achieve a major success, their prestige in the Arab world and that of the Soviets will soar and they will become a, if not the, dominant factor in the area. The position of all moderates such as Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia will weaken, and our hopes of progress in either the peace process or Lebanon will disappear. Only if the Syrians are seen to suffer a setback will our broader interests in the Middle East be advanced. If a full-scale Syrian-Israeli conflict breaks out, U.S. overall interests in the Middle East probably would be best served by the quickest possible Israeli victory and the least possible U.S. involvement.

#### Other Problem Areas

In addition to specific actions we take vis-a-vis the Soviets, Syrians and Israelis, we will want to consider other responses to an outbreak of Syrian-Israeli hostilities.

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1. What to do with the U.S. MNF contingent in Beirut: Any decision on altering the status or mission of our Marine contingent in Beirut will depend on the severity of hostilities; if, for example, the conflict is contained to the Bekaa Valley but the U.S. contingent is subject to indirect artillery fire, we should make every effort to ensure the Marines remain in Beirut, recognizing their contribution to U.S. prestige and standing in the region. In the interim, we could consider moving U.S. naval vessels off Beirut out of artillery range. On the other hand, more general hostilities which could lead to substantial U.S. casualties would leave us little choice but withdrawal. Much of the ultimate decision, of course, will depend on the assessment of the U.S. commander on the scene. In any decision concerning the MNF we will want to closely consult with our co-contributors and the Government of Lebanon. These consultations should include not only the future disposition of the MNF, but also any possible change in the MNF's mission to enable it to better cope with hostilities. It may be useful for the CPPG exercise to task relevant agencies with developing contingency plans concerning the disposition of the MNF under various hostility contingencies.

2. Status of UNIFIL during Israeli-Syrian hostilities: Our role concerning the status of UNIFIL in the event of Syrian-Israeli hostilities is much less than with the MNF. Nevertheless, in the event such hostilities affect areas occupied by UNIFIL troops, we would want to take diplomatic moves to reassure the troop contributors in order to ensure they do not withdraw their contingents at the first sign of fighting. We also must be prepared to intervene with the Syrians and/or Israelis if either attempts to interfere with UNIFIL operations. (This, of course, assumes UNIFIL's mandate becomes meaningful again once foreign forces are withdrawn.) Finally, in the event all-out war envelopes southern Lebanon, we should be prepared to consider making U.S. evacuation facilities available to UNIFIL troops.

3. Israeli unilateral partial withdrawal to the Awali River: The Israelis have hinted from time to time that, to reduce IDF vulnerability and lessen casualties in Lebanon, they may "straighten their lines" by partially withdrawing to a line along the Awali River. Even though Israel has told us it would consult with us before any such move, it is useful to examine the potential ramifications of such an action:

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-- Israel would only withdraw after it had reasonable assurances Syrian/PLO forces would not fill the vacuum. To do otherwise would run the risk of the Begin Government coming under severe domestic attack for gaining nothing in return for the 500 Israeli lives lost in Lebanon.

-- Although the LAF would be expected to fill the vacuum, Gemayel would be reluctant to send his forces into such a volatile area.

-- Gemayel inevitably would raise the possibility of the MNF -- perhaps in combination with the LAF -- assuming control of this territory.

-- Gemayel would be unwilling to accept the de-facto partition of Lebanon that could likely result from even a partial Israeli withdrawal.